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DE RUEHGB #2907/01 3031837  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 301837Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5289  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002907

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQI ELECTORAL COALITION UPDATE

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Political cohesion continues to elude Iraq's Sunni Arabs, as the various party leaders -- each clinging to his own ambitions -- struggle to form coalitions that will appeal to the country's political and religious middle. The once dominant Tawafuq coalition, centered around the Iraqi Islamic Party, unveiled a significantly weakened electoral lineup on October 17, having lost several of its key members. A rival coalition, the new "Iraq Unity Alliance," was launched on October 22 with Minister of Interior Bolani, a prominent Shia, among its Sunni-dominated leadership that includes Sons of Iraq leader Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha. Former PM Iyad Allawi, a Shia secularist, and Sunni hardline MP Saleh Mutlaq appear to have clinched a deal to merge their respective parties into the "Iraqi National Movement" and are in advanced talks to soon bring in the top two Sunni officials in the current government, VP Hashimi and Deputy PM Issawi. These new coalitions are a positive addition to the Iraqi political arena but will likely face internal power struggles that could limit their viability, especially in the post-election government formation process.  
END SUMMARY.

A Revamped, but Weakened Tawafuq  
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¶2. (SBU) With most of the major political leaders in Iraq's Shia community aligned for the last month with either the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), centered around ISCI and the Sadrist Trend, or the State of Law Alliance (SLA) headed by PM Maliki, attention has been focused on the coalition machinations of Iraq's fractious Sunni political class and two still uncommitted prominent Shia secularists -- former PM Iyad Allawi and Minister of Interior Jawad Bolani. The previously dominant force in Sunni politics, the Tawafuq coalition, was the first out of the gate with an October 17 press conference announcing its new line-up. As before, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) is the core of the coalition, joined by the "Conference for the People of Iraq" (currently holding seven seats in parliament) and a host of small factions, including a few Turkomen, and some tribal leaders.

¶3. (SBU) The new Tawafuq, however, has lost as a partner the "National Dialogue Council" of Sheikh Khalef Allyan and its seven parliamentary seats while also losing the allegiance of the Independent (Sunni) Arab bloc in parliament. Moreover, the IIP, plagued by defections from within its ranks, is a shadow of its former self. Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi left the IIP several months ago after being voted out as party head in an internal leadership election; Deputy PM Rafi al-Issawi has further distanced himself from the IIP. Parliament Speaker Iyad al-Samarra'ie is now the only high-ranking public official left within the party. Osama al-Tikriti, current IIP leader, tried to put an upbeat spin on his party's fortunes at the October 17 press event. "Some members have left us and some groups have joined us but we have emerged strong," he stated. He added that Tawafuq was open to anyone who wants to "strengthen democracy" and would actively recruit new members to expand the coalition.

14. (C) Despite the brave face, the new Tawafuq controls not even a third of the 44 seats it once commanded in parliament. Contacts claim that the IIP brought many of its problems on itself by attempting to monopolize the politics of the Sunni Arab community. The overtly religious nature of the IIP also weakens its appeal; none of the candidates announced by Tawafuq to run in the upcoming parliamentary elections are solidly academic, secular or liberal. The coalition will accordingly have a difficult time reaching out to Iraq's Sunni Arabs who are divided between religious and secular, tribal and urban, and educated and barely literate.

#### A New Player Enters the Political Arena

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15. (C) Fulfilling the predictions of several Embassy sources, a brand new political coalition, the "Iraq Unity Alliance (IUA)," was unveiled to the public on October 22 at a press conference at Baghdad's Babylon Hotel. Composed of 20-plus groups/parties, the IUA is headlined by Minister of Interior Bolani, Sons of Iraq/Sahwa leader Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, and Sheikh Ahmed Abdul Ghafoor al-Sammara'ie, head of the Sunni Waqf (Religious Endowment). Other more prominent members include Saadon al-Dulaimi, a Minister of Defense under former PM Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and Ahmed al-Barrak, head of the Commission for the Resolution of Real Property Disputes and wealthy businessman, whose deep pockets will reportedly supply campaign cash. As a Shia, Bolani lends the self-proclaimed "nationalist" coalition a non-sectarian flavor, but a clear majority of its members are Sunni Arabs.

16. (C) At the public unveiling, IUA leaders proclaimed that the alliance is based on "independence and national sovereignty" and will work for "equality among the Iraqi people and to strengthen the spirit of co-existence." Raad Mukhlis, head of the small "Gathering for Iraq" party within the IUA, told Poloff that the coalition will represent "liberal moderates" not beholden to religious ideologies or foreign governments. He confirmed that the IUA had not yet agreed on leadership positions or power-sharing among its members, and noted that it would likely seek to install a Shia prime minister with a cross-sectarian, ethnically diverse cabinet.

17. (C) Prior to the IUA announcement, its three headliners were reportedly in intense coalition talks with other political leaders not yet aligned with a coalition, most notably former PM Allawi, DPM Issawi, VP Hashimi, Sunni hardline MP Saleh Mutlaq (head of the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue), and Osama al-Nujaifi, an influential MP affiliated with the al-Hadba movement based in Ninewa province (and whose brother, Athil, is governor of Ninewa). A number of observers had predicted creation of a "super coalition" that would include all of these individuals. According to Mukhlis and other contacts, Allawi refused to join the IUA, in part, out of concern that Abu Risha would ally with PM Maliki after the election. (Note: Abu Risha had earlier announced in a public statement from Amman, Jordan that he would join up with Maliki's coalition. Many suspect that he is still a closet Maliki supporter. End note.) Allawi reportedly also rejected a partnership with Bolani due to both men's competing desire to become prime minister. Jaber al-Jaberi, senior advisor to DPM Issawi, told Emboff that Sheikh Samarra'ie had wanted to align with Issawi, Allawi, and al-Nujaifi rather than join the IUA, but that this triumvirate rejected the request as they did not want a senior religious figure to be a part of their decidedly liberal-secular group.

#### The "Iraqi National Movement" Gathers Steam

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18. (C) Given the October 31 deadline for registration of electoral coalitions with the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), time has almost run out for nascent political alliances to coalesce. Allawi told Pol M/C on

October 25 that he continued to hold serious talks with Hashimi, Issawi, Mutlaq, and other politicians to form a new electoral list committed to five core principles: non-sectarian government, the "shared unity" of Iraq, acknowledgment of Iraq's Arab and Islamic identity while respecting diversity, reaching agreement on revenue-sharing to benefit all communities, and commitment to building strong state institutions that are not beholden to specific individuals or sects. (Note: According to Embassy-supported polling, Allawi remains surprisingly popular among Iraqis despite his frequent and extended trips outside the country. Although an MP, he is rarely seen in parliament. End note.) Allawi joked that he had personally offered Grand Ayatollah Sistani a place in this coalition during his recent visit to the senior Shia cleric, but only if Sistani promised to take off his sayyid turban.

¶9. (C) In a meeting on October 27, Saleh Mutlaq confirmed to Pol M/C that he and Allawi had finally agreed not only to join forces for the January parliamentary elections, but to merge their respective political parties to form the "Iraqi National Movement" (INM). He and Allawi hoped to bring several more uncommitted Sunni leaders into the fold in the next few days. Mutlaq said his top priority was to get Osama Qnext few days. Mutlaq said his top priority was to get Osama al-Nujaifi on board as he would bring the most votes (i.e., votes from al-Hadba) to the coalition. They also hoped to include Hashimi and Issawi since they were "well qualified" to join the coalition by virtue of their senior government positions, although they would attract relatively few voters on their own, Mutlaq quipped. He added that he and Allawi were still in talks with Bolani and some of his IUA partners about combining their electoral efforts.

¶10. (SBU) Last-minute negotiations to expand the Allawi-Mutlaq alliance are bearing fruit. On October 29, sources in the Hashimi and Mutlaq camps leaked to local media that Hashimi had committed to the INM; a Mutlaq aide claimed that Issawi was also in the fold. Other Sunni political leaders still searching for a home likely feel pressure to join this group, or latch on to an existing electoral alliance, by the October 31 registration deadline. Political parties/entities left out in the cold will still be able to ally with a coalition, but will not be able to run together on a unified list of candidates unless IHEC extends the deadline.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: The presence of prominent secular Shia figures (e.g., Bolani and Allawi) in the leadership of two Sunni-majority coalitions is a positive step away from sectarian politics. The question is whether these alliances can create a new middle in Iraqi politics with broad appeal to liberal/secular Iraqis, as well as moderates from both the Shia and Sunni communities. These new coalitions, however, are far from solid as the competing egos and aspirations they contain will likely result in internal power struggles; some have likened them to marriages of convenience. As with the INA and SLA, the two Shia-majority coalitions, their members could very well split when the post-election jockeying to form a new government begins in earnest. END COMMENT.  
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